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Current Opinion

Jesus the Prophet

The prophetic rôle of Jesus, as recognized by his contemporaries and himself, is an important element in his life and teaching. Professor Kennett, of Cambridge, emphasizes this element in "Jesus the Prophet," *Hibbert Journal*, October, 1906, pp. 136-55. Jesus belonged to the prophets, and possessed the characteristics of the prophet. He lived, thought, and spoke, not as did the men of his generation, but as did the prophets. His teaching, too, was creative, like the prophets', and like most of the prophets he left no writings of his own. Moreover, he had the insight to understand the real meaning of the prophets before him, as none of his contemporaries had. His mind was full of the prophetic feeling, saturated with the prophetic teaching; and if we are to understand him, we must go to those prophetic scriptures which he alone of his generation properly interpreted.

The Monotheism of Israel and that of Babylon and Egypt

The numerous discussions of *Babel und Bibel* in Germany within the last few years have seemed to compel many of the scholars of that country to put themselves on record on some of the fundamental propositions touching Israel's history. Professor Baentsch, of Jena,¹ gathers up and presents the latest utterances on this theme with his own conclusions. The pantheons of Babylon and Egypt were composed of a large body of divinities who had many and diverse attributes. But among these lists of gods there was always a recognition on the part of the worshipers of the superiority of some one or other of them. In fact, the prayers or petitions directed to any particular deity seem to have addressed him as the only god, while in fact he was simply one of a number, he for the time being was pre-eminent in the pantheon of which he was a part.

The difference between this pre-eminence and the monotheism of Israel was that the former was merely a speculative doctrine, while in Israel it was the plain, clear religious recognition of one only God. Again, the so-called monotheism of Babylon was a purely scientific thought, an esoteric doctrine, perceived only by the learned and wise, while in Israel the monotheistic idea was proclaimed to and plainly understood by

¹ *Altorientalischer und israelitischer Monotheismus: Ein Wort zur Revision der entwicklungsgeschichtlichen Auffassung der israelitischen Religionsgeschichte.*

the common people. Once more, the early oriental monotheism did not exclude polytheism, but rather presupposed it. All the inferior gods were merely manifestations of the one divine power. This monotheism did not mean at all the conquest of polytheism. In fact, there was no clash between them. They were part and parcel of the same system. On the other hand, in Israel monotheism meant *one* God who tolerated no other divinity. Israelite monotheism meant a conscious and essential conquest of polytheism. It is a mighty, living, powerful, religious principle that opposes all polytheism as heathendom. The follower of Israel's monotheistic God must declare war against polytheism, and seek in every possible manner to uproot it. To state the two ideas in a sentence: the old oriental monotheism was "the divine and his manifestations;" the Israelite, "the one true God and the idols or vanities." The god of old-oriental monotheism stands in the background of the pantheon and is bound up with an astral system, that gives him a pantheistic character far from the life and petitions of men. The one God of Israelitish monotheism has no relation whatever to an astral system. He, however, rules over the sun, moon, and stars as a free, spiritual, creative, personal Power, with whom man has direct personal relations.

Moses was the founder of this religious and practical monotheism current in Israel. Jehovah was to him the true God, whom he set in especial relation to Israel, and caused that he be made the center of Israel's national religion. All other gods were excluded from relation to Israel.

Through the acceptance of Babylonian myths and speculations in the religion of Jehovah in the Canaanitic and pre-prophetic periods a theoretical and intellectual monotheism seems to have been developed. This monotheism as a doctrine seems for some time to have existed side by side with the purely national monotheism. In the eighth century B. C. the prophets brought together the larger idea of a world-Jehovah and the national Jehovah, and molded them into a unity. The most complete unity of these ideas is found in the Deutero-Isaiah.

In all the discussion there are many unsolved problems that must enter into the final statement of the case. The conclusions show that there is a pressing necessity for a revision of the earlier methods, of the history of Israelitish religion, and especially of the understanding of the Jehovah idea. More regard must be had to the close relationship of other religions to that of Israel. Henceforth this line of research must occupy a prominent part in the question touching Israel's religion.